

Valley Angler The Old Apple Tree by Bill Thompson

The light changes this time of year. In the late afternoon it paints the world in a soft golden hue. It is the kind of light that photographers call “good light”; just about any thing you take a picture of looks better.

The other afternoon was one of those golden days and Janet graciously let me skip out of the shop. Naturally I headed to one of my favorite trout streams. Once I had been given the go ahead I raced around the shop to make sure I had the right rod and reel and the few flies that I would need for the outing. As luck would have it a customer came in just as I was headed out the door which caused a monetary delay. He was an old and valued customer so it was worth it.

The stream is not far from the shop so in a few minutes I was rigging up my four weight rod and walking down to the stream. Like I said it was truly a lovely afternoon and I spent a few moments savoring the day as I tied on the fly. I had fished this pool several times this summer with customers so I knew that there should be a nice brook trout at the edge of the fast water to the left of the big rock. Each time that I had fished here with a client they had all failed to hook this fish and each time I had longed to try for it myself. Today I would have my shot. Like clockwork, on the first cast, the little fellow rose to the fly and like all my clients I missed him. He proved to be a sucker though and a few casts latter he took the fly and this time I was ready.

The thing about this stream is that once you have hooked a fish in a pool you might as well move on to the next one. It is if once you have released that first fish back into the water he goes and tells all the other fish of his experience and the others heed his warning. Not that this is a problem as a short walk either up stream or down will lead to another likely spot. The next pool was just as productive as the first and so it went as I worked my way up stream; one fish after another.

This little river is easily waded this time of year and this day I was unencumbered by waders. A pair of shorts, a T-shirt and my felt soled wading boots are all that is required. I normally carry a small fishing bag when fishing streams like this, but I had left it at home so I was forced to wear my vest. Before leaving the truck I had removed three fly boxes and two extra reels so it was slightly lighter than normal. I had brought a bottle of water, however it had been in the truck for several days and it was quite warm. I opted to leave it in the stream under a rock in order to cool it down.

As small as this river is it doesn't require long casts. I prefer to cast upstream and rarely have more than fifteen feet of fly line out at any time. By carefully wading and picking likely spots to present the fly you can have a banner day. This is not to say that these fish are pushovers. These little guys are just as wary as their larger cousins in larger streams. A miss-step when wading can clear the pool and a sloppy cast will do the same.

Fly selection is not an issue with these trout and they are just as likely to take a Royal Coachman as they are a tiny Blue Wing Olive. For that reason I limit myself to one small fly box with a dozen or so flies. Today the Royal Coachman was working just fine.

One of the reasons that I like this stream so much is because of the solace that it offers. Unlike the busy Saco, filled with partying swimmers and boaters, it is seldom if ever that I meet another sole. Today however, the high pitched beep beep of a truck in reverse, unloading lumber for a new house, could be heard over the babble of the stream. Another new home on an old road that to my way of thinking already has too many. But, today I was not going to let that bother me and I headed back down stream to get away from the offensive intrusion.

I stopped at my put in place and found my water; which was by now cold enough to drink and took a few sips. A few minutes later I was casting the Coachman to another good spot. And so it went until I came to the last pool of the day. This pool is one of the largest on the river and usually holds the largest trout. Today was no exception. The trout was large enough that I actually got him up onto the reel. Bear in mind that with only fifth-teen feet of line out in a pool that was maybe only thirty feet long this was not all that difficult. When I was able to get my hand under the fish he was an honest ten inches; a whooper for this river.

I few weeks ago I broke down and purchased a new camera; one that is capable of taking photos underwater. Ever since I got it I have been trying to get a picture of a trout being released in the water. At last the opportunity had arisen. I struggled to retrieve the camera from my shirt pocket at the same time trying to hold the trout. Just about the time I got the shirt unbuttoned and the camera in hand the trout gave a shake and threw the hook disappearing back into the depths of the pool. Apparently he had no desire to pose for this aspiring paparazzi.

At this point it was time to call it a day. I reeled in, clipped the fly from the leader and placed it in my drying patch. As is my custom I left the stream at this point in order to walk back up the road to the truck rather than walk back up the stream. Once out of the river you must cross an old field to get back to the road. The moment that I stepped out of the dark green shade of the river and into the field the world was bathed in that late summer early fall golden light that I spoke of. A couple of weeks earlier this field had been full of ripe blueberries, but today they had all gone by. Someone had recently mowed the field and the left over straw clung to my wet wading boots in clumps. In the center of the field there is an old apple tree. A large pine tree has grown up right next to it and the apple tree has grown around the pine. It as if the apple tree has embraced the pine. The apple tree has been unattended for a long time, but it still bears fruit and it was full of small golden yellow apples and the ground was covered with drops.

I stopped for a moment and thought about the tree and how at one time this field was somebody's prized orchard that had now gone to waste. That old farmer had put a lot of effort and sweat into that tree and the few others that still remained on the edge of the field. Standing in the field alone I was struck by the "good light" and realized that it might make a pretty good snapshot. I unbuttoned my shirt pocket and got out the camera. Unlike the brook trout the old apple tree stood still.

See you on the river.

